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THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

TIME, MEANING AND TRANSCENDENCE

II. PROFESSOR DEWEY'S *Tertium Quid*

IT would appear from their title that the chief purpose of Professor Dewey's recent articles in this JOURNAL¹ is to vindicate a third variety of realism which is neither dualistic nor monistic. The considerations which seem to him to support this, however, are fully broached only in his second article, to which I now turn.

1. The first question which it would seem pertinent to ask is whether such a *tertium quid* is logically conceivable, *i.e.*, whether the two other species of realism do not exhaust the possibilities of the *genus*. Upon this question Mr. Dewey does not neglect to touch. He finds that—in consequence of a general “addiction to uncritical use of the principle of excluded middle”—I have too hastily assumed that “the disjunction between monistic and dualistic realism is exhaustive. There remains pluralistic realism. . . . The things which are taken as meaning or intending other things are infinitely diversified, and so are the things meant. Smoke stands for fire, an odor for a rose, different odors for different things, . . . and so on *ad infinitum*.”² This is much as if one should argue that the division of the class of finite whole numbers into odd and even is not exhaustive because “there remain also telephone numbers.” In other words, Mr. Dewey's “pluralistic” species of realism, as his illustrations show, is distinguished by means of a *fundamentum divisionis* different from that by which dualistic and monistic realism are distinguished. By the last-mentioned is meant the doctrine that in perception and thought the object known is always present immediately, without duplication or “representation,” in the cognitive experience; by dualistic realism is meant the doctrine which denies this universal direct presence of the thing known in the knowing, and declares that the object of knowledge

¹ “Realism without Monism or Dualism,” XIX, pp. 309–317; 351–361; here cited as *R. M. D.*

² *R. M. D.*, p. 356.

may be, and in at least some cases can be shown to be, existentially other than the content of knowledge. Since the essence of the second theory is the negation of the immediacy asserted by the first, the dichotomy is complete;³ no other realistic view is possible with respect to the matter to which the doctrines in question refer, namely, the universal identity or possible non-identity of object and content. Mr. Dewey's "pluralistic" class does not lie outside this two-fold division; it might be a sub-species of one of the classes mentioned. Certainly there is nothing in epistemological dualism which requires anyone to deny that "different odors stand for different things," or even that "the things which mean other things, and likewise the things meant, are infinitely diversified." "Dualistic realism" does *not*, as Mr. Dewey's antithesis would seem to imply, mean the theory that there are only two "things" in the universe.

And, in fact, it turns out that his own view is epistemologically dualistic, in one sense of the word "knowledge," and monistic if the word is used in another sense. "Wherever inference or reflection comes in," we are told—and Mr. Dewey would "not call anything knowledge in a logical or intellectual sense unless they do come in—there is, clearly, mediation of an object by some other entity which points to, signifies, or represents it." Here is an obvious dualism. But, he adds, "knowledge in the complete sense of the word" requires that "the object" shall be "'reached' eventually," that "the indication or signifying" be "borne out, verified, in something immediately present." Until this is accomplished, we have (in spite of the definition of a different kind of "knowledge" cited just above) only "a claim to knowledge," not knowledge itself. Here, then, since (apparently) the actual object known—though it gets its "cognitive status" from "a prior mediation"—is required to be "immediately experienced," we have an equally obvious epistemological monism. But this employment of the term "knowledge" in two senses does not show that the disjunction which Mr. Dewey challenges is not exhaustive. When he is using the term in any *one* sense, his account of knowledge falls on one

³ One might, of course, be a dualistic realist with respect to some *parts* of the field of supposed knowledge (*e.g.*, to the objects of thought) and monistic with respect to other parts (*e.g.*, the objects of perception). But the distinction of meaning (not of application) of the two theories remains unchanged—as does the irrelevancy of Mr. Dewey's remark about the "pluralistic" variety. In other words, with respect to any given known object, a realist must take either the monistic or the dualistic view; and the application of the dualistic to any object contradicts the universal proposition which defines the position usually understood by the term "monistic realism."

side or the other of the antithesis; and even with the aid of both senses, it never succeeds in offering us an example of any third way of knowing.

In the main, it is epistemological dualism that prevails in Mr. Dewey's paper. In the "knowledge" which constitutes most of our science, things are known—as he not merely concedes but insists—not by their direct presence at the moment of judgment about them, but through "surrogates." The geologist does not, after all, "immediately experience" extinct animals, even "eventually." But Mr. Dewey's essential contention is that such epistemological dualism does not imply a psycho-physical dualism. The "surrogates," he seeks to show, are not psychical entities, such as "ideas" or "mental states," but simply other objective "things."

2. To understand his reasons for this contention, it is necessary to examine his remarks about "meaning," which seem to me the most significant part of the second paper. "The problem of meaning," Mr. Strong has recently said, "is well adapted to take us to the roots of things."⁴ With this Mr. Dewey would apparently agree. "Meanings," he writes, "are the characteristic things in intellectual experience. They are the heart of every logical function." But his treatment of this all-important notion seems to me throughout ambiguous, sometimes inconsistent, and in great part irrelevant to the issues raised in my paper in *Essays in Critical Realism*, to which he is replying. Three distinct, though not by him clearly and steadily distinguished, senses of "meaning" are discoverable in his argument.

(a) In the more frequent and more definite passages on the subject, "meaning" signifies the relation or "function" of causal or other implication between facts or existents. One thing "means" another when its existence, or presence in experience, furnishes the ground for a valid inference to the existence or empirical occurrence of the other. Thus smoke "means" fire, an odor "means" a flower still to be smelled, the oscillation of the needle of a seismograph "means" a distant earthquake. In this sense, Mr. Dewey observes, meanings as well as things meant are objective; but they (meanings) are not physical, nor are they mental "in any psychical dualistic existential sense."⁵ Mr. Dewey is, indeed, willing to admit the word "mental" into the vocabulary of philosophy in this connection, but only in a new sense, namely, to designate *any* entity (e.g., a physical one) in so far as it is conceived as "exercising the function of being a surrogate of some absent thing." But this

⁴ *Mind*, January, 1922, p. 71.

⁵ *R. M. D.*, p. 358.

terminological concession does not imply that the object possesses meaning only by grace of the activity of some mind or knower; for we are told that "the relation, connection or mediation of one thing by another is," rather, "an essential feature of the *subject-matter* of knowledge."⁶ Or, as it is written in an earlier paper of Mr. Dewey's, "meanings are intrinsic; they have no instrumental or subservient office because they have no office at all. They are as much qualities of the objects in the situation as are red and black, hard and soft, square and round."⁷ It is, to be sure, difficult to see how this is to be reconciled with the repeated remark that it is only when physical things "become implicated in a reflective inquiry"—only when we "ask what they stand for or indicate" and "when it is asserted that they mean or support a certain conclusion"—that they "*acquire* a representative capacity which they *did not inherently possess*," or "exercise a representative function, though *not in (their) own existence representations*."⁸ However, it is fortunately not essential to my purpose to try to harmonize Mr. Dewey's utterances on this point.

What seems fairly clear is that, in the first sense of meaning, the thing which means and the thing meant are both physical objects; that the relation between them is not necessarily one of similarity; and that the "meaning" itself, is neither psychical nor physical, but a "neutral entity" or "essence."⁹

(b) But a footnote gives us a second definition of "meanings": "of course, upon my theory they are, existentially speaking, the operations involved in any situation having a cognitive reference."¹⁰ These "operations," I take it, are not essences, but definite temporal activities performed by cognitive agents or, if the expression is preferred, by intelligent animals; and we are elsewhere expressly told that they are physical.¹¹ No particular use, however, seems to be made of this definition in Mr. Dewey's present argument.

⁶ *E. M. D.*, p. 354; italics in original.

⁷ *Essays in Experimental Logic*, 1916, p. 17. The "situation" referred to is "the situation which follows upon reflection." If this signifies that, unless they had been reflected upon, the objects would not possess "meaning" at all, the sentence would suggest rather a subjectivistic conception of meaning. But the context of the passage seems to indicate that Mr. Dewey here is writing in his realistic rather than his idealistic or "immediate empiricist" vein.

⁸ *E. M. D.*, p. 352.

⁹ *E. M. D.*, p. 357. Of this surprising resort of a pragmatist to logical realism I shall speak further below.

¹⁰ *E. M. D.*, p. 358, n. 9.

¹¹ *E. L.*, p. 14.

Now if these two were the only sorts of "meaning" which Mr. Dewey recognized as pertinent to the experience called knowing, it is quite true that no argument for the presence of anything "psychical or mental as a term in the judging process" could be drawn from any premise admitted by him. For in the one case, two of the factors concerned (the thing which means and the thing meant) are described as objective physical things, while the third is apparently regarded as a real neutral or logical entity; while in the other case all three factors are described as physical. There is, however, unmistakably distinguishable at certain points in Mr. Dewey's reasoning a third kind of "meaning"; and it is this kind alone which is relevant to those conclusions of mine which Mr. Dewey controverts.

(c) This third sense appears in those passages in which Mr. Dewey recognizes that, whenever thought occurs, something must necessarily be "present-as-absent." This obviously will not fit into the first account of meaning. In that account we were told that "there is something indubitably present, say, smoke," and that it is *this* that means or represents the "something absent, say, fire." But, clearly, in the case supposed the smoke is not present-as-absent; it is just present, an immediate perceptual datum. It is rather, as Mr. Dewey himself goes on to note, the fire that "is presented as absent, as intended."¹² And if the fire is "presented," or made present, it is the presented fire—not, as in the first account, the smoke—that means or represents the absent fire. (There is, of course, an absent fire somehow concerned in the business, else no inference would be necessary.) And the relation between that which means and that which is meant is, in this sort of meaning, necessarily one of similarity, at least of pattern or relational schema. A fire obviously does not become "presented," or present-as-absent, solely by virtue of the presence in experience of something that is not a fire, and is not like a fire, and is in no sense absent. It is not smoke-characters but fire-characters that must be given, and yet referred to a not-present temporal or spatial *locus*, "in any situation having a cognitive reference" to a fire. But this, of course, is simply the ordinary dualistic conception of ideas or images which can "re-present" absent objects because they in some degree resemble or reproduce them. To some sort of presentative dualism, in short, Mr. Dewey is committed as soon as he acknowledges, with respect to the absent fire inferred from present smoke, that "*it is not a case of sheer absence, such as total*

¹² *R. M. D.*, p. 354.

ignorance would imply."¹³ At the moment when he wrote these words, Mr. Dewey must have had at least a transitory realization of the fact that to constitute a knowledge of an absent fire a present smoke is not enough; that the fire too must in some fashion be recognized as a part of the present content of the experience; and yet that, since the actual fire is truly absent, it can not, so to say, also be present *in propria persona*, but must be represented by a sort of deputy-fire, a true "surrogate."

What prevents Mr. Dewey from seeing the dualistic implications of this third sort of meaning is apparently a confusion of the type pointed out in my previous paper—a tendency to fluctuate between two or more senses of an ambiguous term or proposition, and to use arguments based upon the one sense to justify the rejection of unwelcome conclusions that would follow from the other. In the present instance he seems to treat the first and third senses of "meaning" as interchangeable; and since he is able to show that the first, as defined, has no objectionably dualistic consequences, he fails to see the consequences of the third. All that he has to say about the first is, in fact, irrelevant not merely to the particular issue which I had raised, but also to the cognitive experience in general. An "objective" or "intrinsic" reference of one physical thing to another is not the same as an apprehension of that reference. "A thing, *res*, actually present, smoke, rock" may to the top of its bent objectively mean "something else of the same order of existence as itself, a fire, or geologic animal"; but in doing so it presumably does not recreate, bring into temporal coexistence with itself, extinct animals or dead fires. Such a meaning is *known*, however, only when there are simultaneously given in the field of awareness of a reflective organism both the "thing actually present," and the "presentation" of the something else which is not actually present, and which may at the moment of the experience be physically non-existent. A present rock is not, by itself, the thought of a deceased dinosaur, nor a smoke-cloud here the thought of a spent fire beyond the mountains.

3. Does, then, the epistemological dualism involved in the kind of "meaning" which is essential to cognition lead to psycho-physical dualism? The reasons which have seemed to me to require (of a realist) an affirmative answer to this question Mr. Dewey states briefly but not incorrectly: "Present-as-absent, or the presence of the absent, is an impossibility as regards any physical thing. Hence there is an admission of a psychical entity." For "psychical" in my usage means any indubitable content of experience

¹³ *E. M. D.*, p. 354.

which can not be assigned to the physical world as simultaneously constituted. To this argument, however, Mr. Dewey takes exception on the ground that it unwarrantably "assumes an exhaustive disjunction between the physical and psychical." My unhappy addiction to the principle of excluded middle has, it seems, again been my undoing; it has caused me to ignore "the growing number of persons who hold that certain entities are neutral to the distinction of psychical and physical," and to "assert by implication that all meanings, relations, activity systems, functions, affairs like mathematical entities, etc., . . . are psychical." Until I have "wrestled with the question of essence in its bearing upon the exhaustiveness of the disjunction between the physical and the psychical, and until many non-pragmatists are disposed of," Mr. Dewey feels entitled "to leave the matter here."

With respect to the principle of excluded middle I am afraid that I am a confirmed *habitué*; for I still find myself convinced of the exhaustiveness of the particular disjunction presupposed by the argument in question. Mr. Dewey's criticism of it is, to be plain, beside the mark in three respects:

(a) The "question of essences" has nothing to do with the universe of discourse with which my discussion was, and is, obviously concerned, *viz.*, the universe of particular concrete existents in time. Within that universe a logically exhaustive disjunction of the physical and the psychical can very well be made out—and that wholly without prejudice to the doctrine of the "neutrality" of purely logical entities. A given bit of empirical content present here and now in my consciousness, and possessing the attribute of extension, either is or is not assignable to the "public" spatial order of the physical sciences and to the system to which the equations of thermodynamics apply. And the sole issue with which my inquiry had to do was whether there are any such concrete particulars in experience, the characteristics of which forbid their allocation to the physical world. If there are such, their non-physical status does not prove that they are mere "essences." The argument, therefore, for their psychical character—in the sense defined—remains entirely unaffected by Mr. Dewey's Macedonian cry to the logical realists.

(b) Moreover, the particular class of things of which the psychical character was asserted was not, as Mr. Dewey seems to suppose, the class of "meanings," in the sense in which he here uses the term. So far as the present argument goes, a meaning may be as "neutral" as anyone may choose to think it—if it is simply a logical relation subsisting between two concrete things. In the

dualistic view, the psychical entity involved is primarily the thing which means—not the “meaning” nor, necessarily, the thing meant. It is, in other words, the idea that stands for an absent real object. It is the same entity to which Mr. Dewey ascribes the status of present-as-absent; and this, clearly, is not a mere essence.

(c) Finally, I should—before reading Mr. Dewey’s last paper—have thought it wholly redundant to discuss logical realism in an essay devoted specifically to an examination of the position of the pragmatists. For I had supposed that no doctrine could be more foreign to their position. Now, I confess, I am uncertain how Mr. Dewey really stands on this matter. Much of his language seems to suggest a belief in an independently existing realm of logical reals. But I take refuge again in an excluded middle! Either Professor Dewey is a logical realist or he is not. If he is, we shall all, assuredly, have to revise profoundly our conceptions of the meaning and doctrinal affinities of pragmatism; yet, as has been shown, the status of the particular question here under discussion would remain untouched. If he is not an adherent of that view, the introduction of it into the discussion would seem reminiscent of the well-known red herring. For there is not, I believe, any generally accepted rule of the etiquette of philosophical debate which requires that a critic, before examining the opinions which a given school of philosophers hold, shall first refute the opinions which they do not hold.

Since, to my great regret, I have not thus far in these papers been able to express a very large measure of agreement with Mr. Dewey, I shall take as the text for a summing-up a sentence of his which seems to me both true and truly “pragmatic.” “Imaginative recovery of the bygone,” he has written, “is indispensable to successful invasion of the future.”¹⁴ That embodies neatly in a single phrase four truths about our intertemporal cognition which underlie both man’s life of action and his life of feeling. Drawn out into full and formal statement, the propositions implicit in this pregnant sentence are these: (a) It is things actually “bygone” that man requires to know, if his adventure into the future is to be guided by intelligence. Hence it is a confounding of fundamental categories and a denial of an indispensable postulate of the practical intelligence, to speak of the “object” of such knowledge—the matters of fact concerning which it informs us—as exclusively “prospective,” or even as present. (b) Yet the bygone must in some way be “recovered,” i.e., brought into the field of present thought, if it is to serve as a guide for further inquiry or for future

¹⁴ *Creative Intelligence*, p. 14; already cited, *E. C. B.*, p. 53.

action. Its characters and their relations, or such of them as are pertinent to the contemplated "invasion of the future," must be actually before the agent here and now, to be reviewed and analyzed. (c) The recovery of these, however, is "imaginative," not literal or physical. As physical existents the bygone things remain forever irrecoverable. Memory does not raise the dead nor history rebuild Babylon. It is in some realm or order other than that of present physical objects that the recovered characters of the bygone have their present being—in the realm, namely, of "images." (d) Since the things which are the objects of our backward-looking knowledge *are* bygone and since some of them, at least, were when existent, physical, while the things in which we now believe ourselves able to read off their characters and relations are present and imaginal, these two classes of things can not be called existentially one. In any true inventory of the concrete particulars in the universe, they would constitute distinct items.

These four truths of common sense do not, of course, give us an exhaustive theory even of intertemporal knowledge. Yet they set one upon the way to it, and they embody the primary facts or necessary presuppositions to which any such theory, and any rational logic of practice, must conform. If, then, Professor Dewey will but reflect seriously upon the implications of this true saying of his own, he will, I can not but think, find reason for accepting all the conclusions which in his recent papers he has the air of denying: *viz.*, that we make judgments which truly "mean" the past and not merely the "prospective"; that consequently epistemological dualism—the doctrine that the present content of a cognitive experience and the absent object "meant" by that experience are two entities, not one—is unescapable; that the present content, if it is to function as a practically serviceable means of information about absent objects, must in some degree reproduce the characters or relation-patterns of those objects; that it is necessary to "admit the psychical or mental as a term in the judging process"; and that, since the present means of learning the characters of the past or other absent object is indirect, the general validity of that means can not be verified in immediate experience, but can only be postulated, as a thing necessary to be believed if we are, in the present, to employ intelligence for the shaping of the future.

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